

stitution, the Army must favor a soldier's discipline and obedience over his or her self-actualization or search for meaning (as called for by "spiritual fitness"). Like other groups in conflict, the Army has an interest in standardizing the behavior of its members. To achieve this, the Army can threaten and deliver punishment. From the group's perspective, this interest is necessary and legitimate. It is, in my view, *not* legitimate for psychologists to obfuscate the conflict of interest between Army and soldier and to act as though they care, above all, about the well-being of the soldier.

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## The Dark Side of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

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Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF), the focus of the January 2011 special issue of the *American Psychologist*, is a \$125 million resilience training initiative designed to reduce and prevent the adverse psychological consequences of combat for soldiers and veterans. These are worthy goals. Soldiers and veterans deserve the best care possible, and military psychologists have critically important roles to play. But the special issue is troubling in several important respects. Elsewhere, we have offered a detailed review (Eidelson, Pilisuk, & Soldz, 2011). Here we offer only a summary of our concerns.

The CSF program is a massive research project launched without pilot testing to determine, first, the effectiveness of the training in a military environment. This is highly irregular and obviously worrisome considering the stakes. Moreover, the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP), the key model upon which the CSF intervention is based, was developed on entirely different populations, and according to a recent meta-analysis (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009), PRP's effects have been modest and inconsistent. They cannot be generalized to the challenges that soldiers face in combat, including those that trigger posttraumatic stress disorder.

No evidence was provided indicating that CSF received preliminary review by an independent ethics review board. This is particularly disturbing since the program includes components that are *mandatory* for all U.S. soldiers. The discarding of informed consent protections is a serious violation of the Nuremberg Code established after World War II in response to the actions of Nazi doctors (although, remarkably, it does not violate the American Psychological Association's ethics code—see Ethical Standard 8.05, APA, 2002). In addition, the special issue noted only one potential ethical concern: It could be unethical to *withhold* CSF from soldiers.

There are, however, other ethically fraught possibilities. Litz et al. (2009) referred to "moral injury" in describing the challenges and consequences soldiers face in response to "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (p. 700). Resilience training could, for example, harm our soldiers by making them more likely to engage in combat actions that adversely affect their psychological health. Missing from CSF is a component devoted to helping soldiers grapple with the profound ethical dilemmas involved in their duties, including killing in furtherance of state policy.

CSF draws heavily on "positive psychology." Cornum, Matthews, and Seligman (January 2011) described the program as aspiring "to increase the number of soldiers who derive meaning and personal growth from their combat experience" (p. 6). Few dispute the benefits of broadening psychology's purview, but there are compelling critiques of positive psychology that bear on the foundation of CSF. These include its failure to appreciate the valuable functions played by "negative" emotions such as anger, guilt, and fear; its disregard for harsh societal realities such as poverty and oppression; and its promotion of claims without sufficient scientific support (e.g., Coyne & Tennen, 2010).

In the final article, Seligman and Fowler (January 2011) tried to counter anticipated objections about how closely the APA and professional psychology have aligned themselves with the U.S. military. They wrote, "It is not the military that sets the nation's policies on war and peace. . . . Withholding professional and scientific support for the people who provide the nation's defense is, we believe, simply wrong" (p. 85). But no one recommends withholding services from those in need. When acting ethically, however, health professionals address the needs of their clients before the wishes of the institutions that hire them. And the U.S. military does indeed play a role in establishing policies: Generals make political statements advocating for war; military officials work with contractors to sell weapons of war and war itself; and the military pays propaganda organizations to spin news and promote war to government officials and the public.

Seligman and Fowler (2011) claimed, "The balance of good done by building the physical and mental fitness of our soldiers far outweighs any harm that might be done" (p. 86). Their cost-benefit analysis was offered as true without any evidence. But in this calculation, how much weight was given to the tragic numbers of civilian casualties in Iraq (minimally estimated in the hundreds of thousands) and Afghanistan? Has "do no harm," the fundamental principle underlying psychology's ethics, become "do no harm to Americans, unless it serves the interests of the state"? Moreover, the refrain "support our troops" ignores the reality that decisions to use force are not always made with the well-being of military personnel in mind.

The same authors stated, "We are proud to aid our military in defending and protecting our nation right now, and we will be proud to help our soldiers and their families into the peace that will follow" (Seligman & Fowler, 2011, p. 86). But the blind embrace of simple notions of "patriotism" is inappro-

appropriate for psychologists dedicated to promoting universal human health and well-being. Ideological convictions based upon myths of American exceptionalism are no substitute for an examination of their verity. An honest evaluation reveals that U.S. military history has not been primarily "defensive" in nature but rather has regularly involved efforts at imperial control to further "national interests." Empire building has caused great harm to our own safety and well-being, and the promise of peace following military victories has surely not materialized.

The APA's uncritical promotion of CSF reveals much about current moral challenges facing the profession of psychology. There are many complex issues regarding the program's empirical foundations, its promotion as a massive research project absent informed consent, and the basis on which its developers justify the program. We would expect a special issue of the *American Psychologist* to include an extended discussion of these matters. It did not. Helping people harmed by trauma is essential. But we should not be helping an institution prepare to place more people in harm's way without careful questioning and ongoing review of the rationale for doing so. If the CSF program is truly about enhancing well-being, then we should consider whether these soldiers might be helped more by finding nonmilitary ways to resolve the conflicts and concerns for which they carry such heavy burdens.

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## Exposing the Glosses in Seligman and Fowler's (2011) Straw-Man Arguments

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I was disappointed to see an entire special issue of the *American Psychologist* (January 2011) devoted to military psychology, but I was especially concerned about the one-sided moral justifications presented by Seligman and Fowler (2011) in the final article of the issue. They misrepresented potential objections to their program and dismissed the inherent dangers of cooperation between organized psychology and the military.

The first "objection" they claimed to review was that "Psychology should devote its scarce resources to helping those who are suffering, not those who are well" (Seligman & Fowler, 2011, p. 86), and they then proposed that the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program will effectively prevent suffering. They did not present evidence for this proposal, and they ignored the obvious fact that the best way to prevent posttraumatic stress disorder is to avoid trauma in the first place. They neglected to consider that fighting unnecessary wars would be a good place to start.

If one grants the premise that military force is sometimes necessary, it is not clear that any amount of training can adequately prepare soldiers for the reality of the suffering that they will witness and often inflict on other human beings. My father volunteered and served with valor in the Pacific in World War II, and though he was an accomplished storyteller, he would not speak about the things that he did and saw. I think that his was the response of a sane and decent man.

The second objection Seligman and Fowler (2011) addressed is that "Aiding the military will make people who kill for a

living feel better about killing and help them do a better job of it" (p. 86). They claimed that opposition to making people feel better about killing turns on whether or not one agrees with foreign policy. While a close reading of the history of the last 50 years shows that the use of our military has mostly been to support brutal dictators in other countries, in fact the objection does not hinge on this policy, but rather on a very complex moral distinction: When, if ever, is it justified to help someone feel good about killing someone else? Having worked with veterans who agonized over having killed civilians in Viet Nam, I believe that this issue is a much more convoluted problem than either Seligman or Fowler contend. Their argument can easily be read as justifying any killing that is done in uniform.

When I was an undergraduate studying psychology, I heard a professor brag that he could turn any platoon of 18-year-olds into storm troopers. All he would need, he said, was permission to allow some soldiers to die in training accidents and to have the rest of the platoon perform their autopsies. Imagine for a moment that he was right. Do we really want to develop an army that kills without compunction or remorse?

Seligman and Fowler's (2011) argument against the third "objection" is the most troubling, as they said that "without a strong military and the will to use force responsibly in self-defense, our victories would not have happened" (p. 86). This assumes two facts that are not in evidence. The first is that our force has always been used responsibly. Is killing noncombatants a responsible use of force? Is invading another country absent a declaration of war a responsible use of force? While individual soldiers are bound to obey lawful orders and are instructed to disobey unlawful orders, in fact most soldiers will respond to training and group cohesion and do things (like tossing a grenade into a family household) that they would normally find morally reprehensible. The fact that we as a nation are complicit in the decisions to put soldiers in this situation does not eliminate their moral responsibility, or ours either.

The second fact Seligman and Fowler assume is that we are acting in self-defense. Despite American popular misinformation, Iraq did not attack the United States on 9/11. Rather, we invaded and occupied a foreign nation that had not attacked us, and in so doing we killed thousands of Iraqi civilians. When we finally leave, we will leave a devastated and divided society.

I believe that psychologists do have a professional responsibility to aid suffering

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